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New partnership to aid sea turtles through technology

MELBOURNE, Fla., August 13, 2018 — A collaboration among the Brevard Zoo, the University of Central Florida, University of Florida and volunteers from Northrop Grumman Corp. is exploring innovative ways to integrate expertise and technology to help local sea turtle researchers collect detailed data. The unique project is supported by a \$100,000 grant from the Northrop Grumman Foundation.

While still in a preliminary stage, the project will yield one or more “products” such as nest sensors that record temperature and sand conditions, and possibly use unmanned aerial vehicles that document offshore mating behaviors in male turtles. The project will serve as a stepping stone for further collaboration between various institutions in the scientific and technological community, a foundation for further research and tools development that will provide much needed data to scientists, and offer an opportunity for public and student engagement in the project.

The Brevard Zoo plans to use the technology as a portal through which to engage Brevard Public Schools students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programming. “The mysterious nature of sea turtles makes them incredibly alluring, but it poses challenges to researchers trying to learn as much as they can about these threatened and endangered animals,” said Keith Winsten, the zoo’s executive director. “The technical solutions Northrop Grumman volunteers are creating will help us collect valuable data that will hopefully be used to inform conservation policy at state, federal and international levels, and generate more interest in STEM education.”

“We have more than 60 Northrop Grumman volunteers working on their own time, alongside volunteers from the zoo, to develop creative approaches to acquire the best data possible without intruding into the turtle’s environment,” said Deb Drexler, Corporate Citizenship Southern Region Manager for Northrop Grumman. “The team is utilizing expertise from a broad range of disciplines to develop the optimum solution for the project.”

Globally, all seven sea turtle species face the threat of marine debris, entanglement in fishing gear, boat strikes, beach degradation, climate change, pollution and poaching. More than 35,000 individuals laid eggs on the beaches of Brevard County in 2017, making the region the most significant area for green sea turtle nesting in North America and loggerhead sea turtle nesting in the western hemisphere.

Northrop Grumman and the Northrop Grumman Foundation are committed to expanding and enhancing the pipeline of diverse, talented STEM students globally. They provide funding to sustainable STEM programs that span from preschool to high school and through collegiate levels, with a major emphasis on middle school students and teachers. In 2017, Northrop Grumman and the Northrop Grumman Foundation continued outreach efforts by contributing over \$20.4 million to diverse STEM-related groups such as the Air Force Association and CyberPatriot, the REC Foundation (VEX Robotics), National Science Teachers Association, Great Minds in Stem (Viva Technology) and EarthEcho International's Expeditions.

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Brevard Zoo is home to more than 900 animals representing 195 species from all over the world. As a not-for-profit organization, it is a leader in the fields of animal wellness, education and conservation. More information is available at www.brevardzoo.org.

Treetop Trek features five aerial obstacle courses that whisk guests above parts of the Zoo and through lush Florida landscapes. More information is available at www.treetoptrek.com.